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- 1 Anita Jarczok, *Writing an Icon: Celebrity Culture and the Invention of Anaïs Nin*
- 2 Swallow Press, 2017. Pp. 263. ISBN 978-0-8040-1176-1
- 3 Wayne E. Arnold
- 4 The identities Anaïs Nin created surrounding her public and private image are multifold, incongruent, and intentional. What is not intentional, we learn in Anita Jarczok's new study, is the posthumous alterations to Nin's persona. In this fascinating walk through Nin's public-image history, Jarczok meticulously delineates the "rises and falls" of Nin's reception. "I am not preoccupied with determining who Anaïs Nin really was," Jarczok states in the introduction, "or which of the versions of her that have been circulating in the media is accurate" (pg. 5). This publication, then, in no biography of Nin, nor is it a critical study of her work. Falling within the field of Life Writing, *Writing and Icon* goes through several facets of Nin's identity creation. Nin's famous *Diaries* are of course a part of these realms of identities; but more important for Jarczok is how the media and Nin's supporters (and detractors) helped form varied images of Nin that, for the most part, still surround her iconic image.
- 5 Jarczok examines several angles of Nin's identity, and there are two distinct overarching themes: orchestrated marketing and the sensualized author. Nin's orchestrated marketing was controlled—to some extent—during her lifetime. Jarczok's focus on Nin's life concentrates on the format of the dairies, their publication, the speaking events, and critic reactions. The image manipulation is now relatively known; Nin wrote and rewrote her diaries many times so as to turn them into a marketable product. In doing so, Nin formulated an image of herself that was publicly propagated throughout the 1960s and 1970s. What is valuable, however, is how Jarczok demonstrates these intentional changes in the diaries. Using archival materials (specifically, the original diaries) from the Anaïs

Nin Papers at the University of California, Los Angeles, Jarczok illuminates the modifications Nin made to provide her desired effect. In addition to the diaries, Nin's public speaking engagements also receive significant attention; these lectures attracted a large number of young women (mostly, Jarczok notes, white middle-class women (96)). The speaking engagements, pared with the diaries, were designed to extend a specific image of Nin. A direct connection to understanding how Nin perceived the reception of her first diary arises through the book reviews. Jarczok has meticulously arranged every English review published about Nin's diaries, categorizing them according to the critic's reaction. Doing so builds an understanding of how Nin used the book reviews as a means of feedback to adjust the next diary or her own public image. This analysis of the reviews is a significant component to Jarczok's work, and a meaningful incorporation of the author-critic relationship.

- 6 "Success, Scandal, Sex, and the Search for the 'Real' Anaïs Nin" is Jarczok's most groundbreaking chapter in *Writing an Icon*. The sensualizing of Nin was put in motion by the posthumous publication of *Delta of Venus* (1977) and then *Henry and June: From A Journal of Love: The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin (1931-1932)*, in 1986. After these releases, and the subsequent unexpurgated diaries, the well-crafted image Nin had created irrevocably transformed. Jarczok examines the impact of the unexpurgated diaries, the biographies, and the film representation of Nin in the first NC-17 film, *Henry & June* (1990). This chapter is valuable for Nin studies—and studies of celebrities in general—as it closely follows Nin's changing public status. Nin's well-crafted image morphed due to the unexpurgated diaries and the subsequent highly publicized sexual film, and Jarczok follows the changes in Nin's persona and elucidates the apparent consequences of these events. Nin went from being one of the figureheads of the second-wave feminist movement—a tenable role, at best—to becoming nearly ostracized from the emerging feminist objectives. The Nin of the 1980s and 1990s shifts from being a writer in her own right to an unequal literary peer of Henry Miller and, to use Jarczok's word, a "sexpot" (141). This divergence has seriously dampened Nin's reputation, at least among academia and her original fans. Added to this, the biographies in the 1990s further damaged Nin, Jarczok argues, as these works exposed the amount of manipulation that went into the publication of the original diaries. Jarczok ties these events, and more, into a cohesive timeline to assist our understanding of these changes as they were unfolding, one after the other.
- 7 Nin's diaries, not her novels, will continue to be her lasting reputation. During her life, the diaries became Nin's bargaining card (29, 31). Not only did Nin use them for decades as a form of enticement to publishers, but beginning with the appearance of the first diary, Nin could exploit the popularity of the diaries to continue promoting her orchestrated image. Coupled with her public speaking appearances, Jarczok contends, "Nin's celebrity is formed at the intersection of production and consumption" (102). The consumption elements (readers, fans, book reviewers, detractors) became an encompassing agenda for Nin. The idea of an agenda for promotion also appears in Tristine Rainer's *Apprenticed to Venus: My Secret Life with Anaïs Nin* (2017). One element of Rainer's narrative focusses on Nin's determination to become famous. The work is a novel/memoir meld, but Rainer—who was close friends with Nin during her rise to fame—supports many of Jarczok's arguments by depicting the behind-the-scenes manipulation of the diaries. Jarczok's chapter "Public Promotion of the Private Self" covers at length Nin's image creation by examining four interconnected aspects of Nin's identity: "Nin the

person, Nin the diary (the manuscript version) persona, Nin the *Diary* (the published version) persona, and Nin the public persona” (47). Nin went from being an “underground” (67) artist struggling to publish to being a widely-recognized name in the United States and Europe. Examining these four elements of the diaries, Jarczok posits, exposes how their publication aided in commodifying Nin, making her a “marketable personality” (87), but a personality with specific and delineated qualities. In the conclusion to *Writing an Icon*, Jarczok looks at Nin’s status in the 21st Century. Thus far, few academic book-length publications on Nin have appeared, suggesting that Nin studies remain marginalized in academia. Throughout the book, Jarczok looks beyond the academic and places focus on the readers and interpreters (i.e. theatrical) of Nin’s image, including personal memoirs, such as Barbara Kraft’s *Anaïs Nin: The Last Days* (2011). Additionally, Jarczok looks to Nin’s online presence, such as blogs, various comments from readers, Facebook pages dedicated to Nin, and the *Wikipedia* page on Nin. By incorporating this digital world of Nin with the traditional media forms, Jarczok provides an overall encompassing view of Nin’s public status. While Jarczok’s direction is not always clear—at times, *Writing an Icon* seems to be lacking a firm argument—the overall work is a substantial addition to Nin studies. Additionally, it provides insight into the manipulation and alteration of personal image through this detailed examination of Nin’s celebrity status and changing posthumous iconicity.